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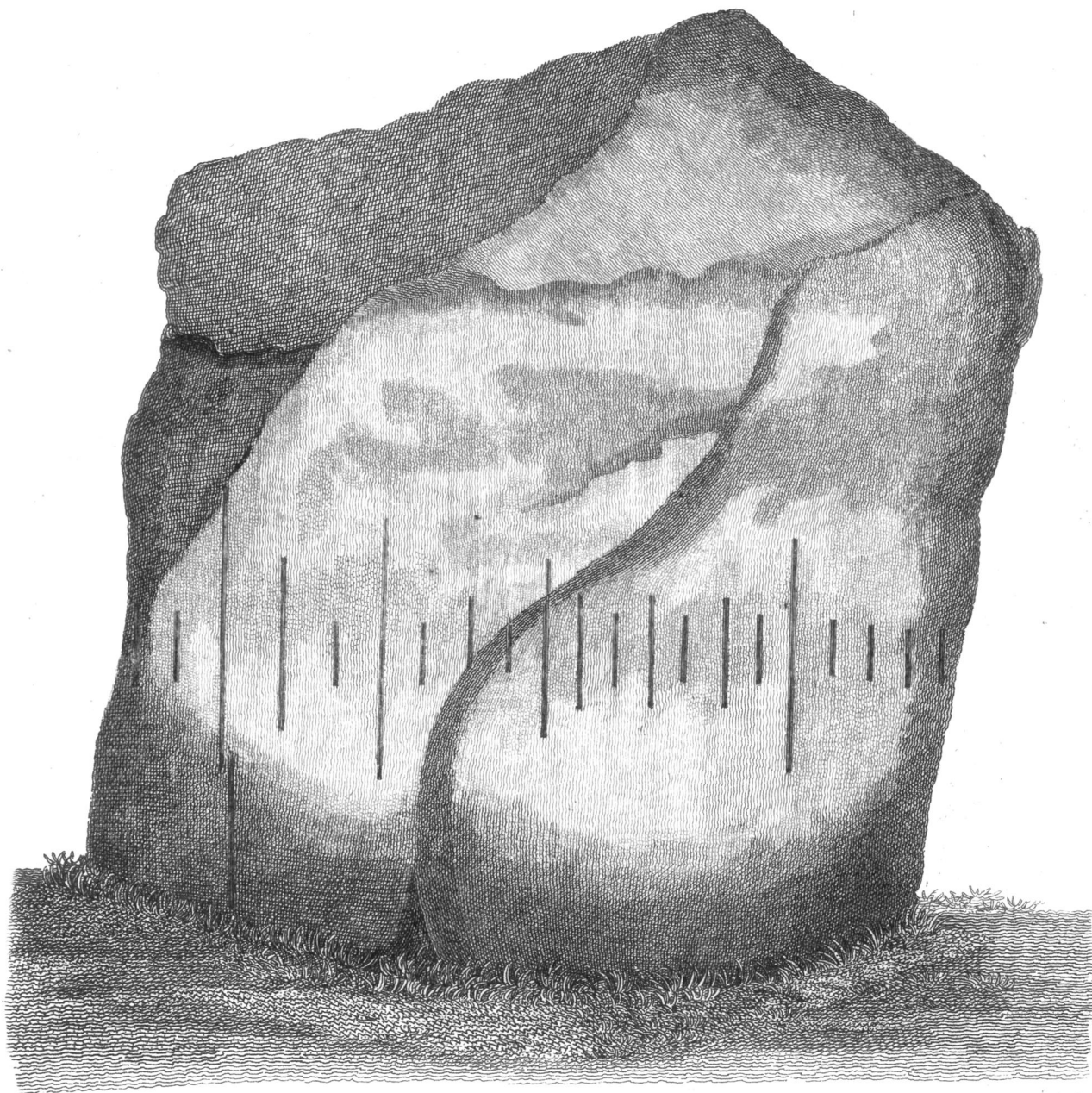
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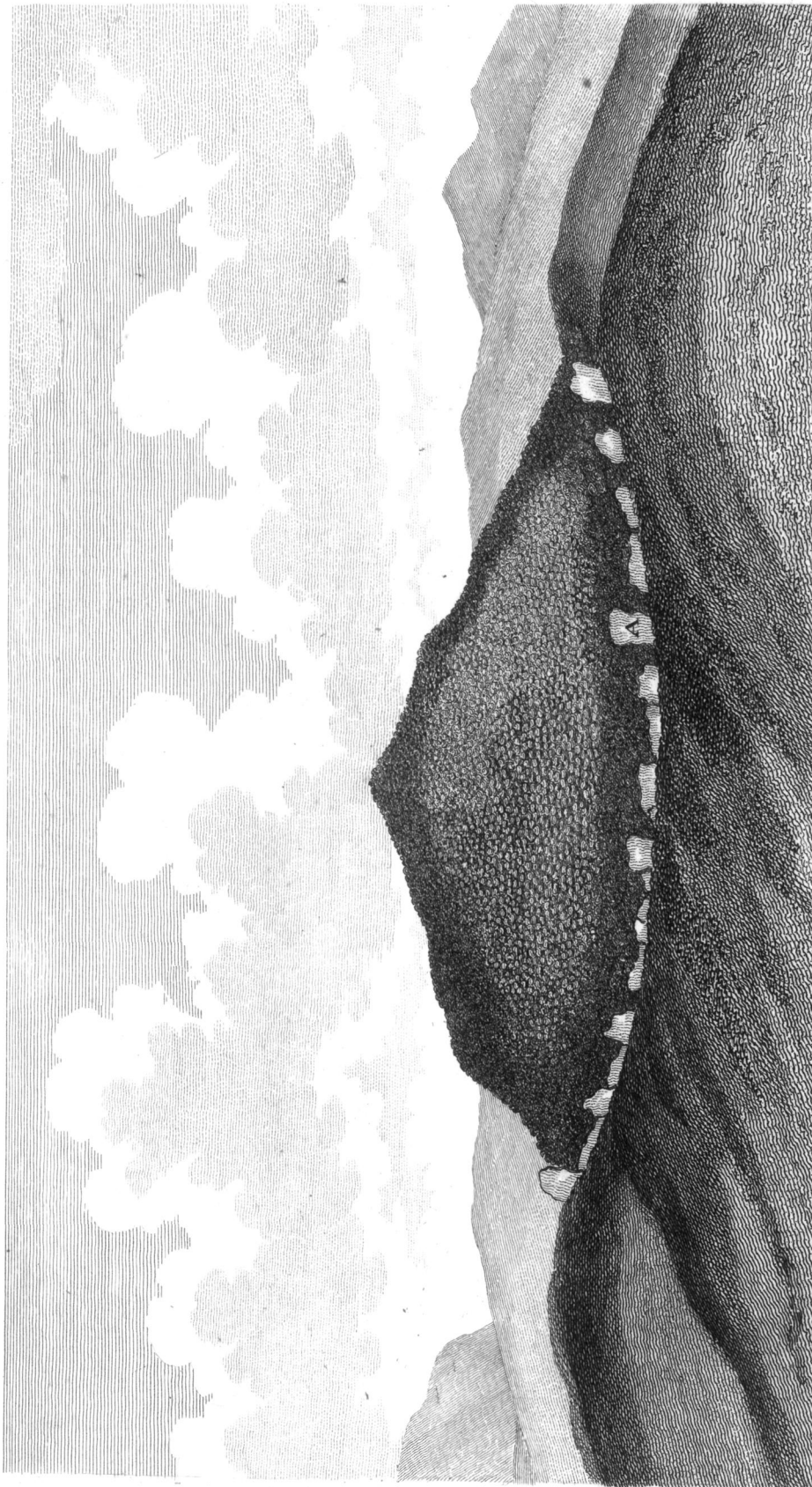
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Some ACCOUNT of the VICARS CAIRN, in the County of ARMAGH; communicated to the COMMITTEE of ANTIQUITIES in two LETTERS, one from DR. BROWNE, Senior Fellow of Trinity College, Dublin; the other from the REV. JOHN YOUNG, Curate of MULLABRACK.

DR. BROWNE, in his letter, dated the 19th day of December, 1799, says, That notwithstanding all that has been written, (by very learned men,) of the Ogham character, and some modern testimonies respecting its existence, he was extremely incredulous as to any monuments being actually extant on which it could be found, and disposed to think that literary enthusiasm had mistaken natural furrows on the stone for engraved characters. But that having satisfied himself that he was in error, he thought it a duty to the Academy, to mention a monument of the kind which had come under his observation. Being at Armagh in the

Read, Dec.
21, 1799.

year 1797, the Lord Primate,* fond of every species of literature and not unacquainted with any, told him it was generally said, that on a high hill, about three miles from the town, an Ogham inscription was to be found. Dr. Browne rode up to the top of this hill and found on its summit a small conical mount or rather heap of small stones, surrounded by a regular circle of large ones upright and about two feet and an half high. The country people immediately directed him to one of those stones on which they said the inscription was; the day being very windy and the stone low, he was forced to lie down on his side to copy it, which he did as well as he was able. At first view he says he was not sure that the indentures in the stone were not natural, but on observing them carefully and their regularity, and comparing them with the natural impressions which were irregularly indented in the other stones and on some part of this, he convinced himself beyond a doubt, that they were artificial, and this is strongly confirmed by the tradition of the country.

Dr. Browne was again at Armagh in September 1799, and again visited the Vicars Cairn with a friend. Not instantly recollecting the particular stone, he asked a peasant who was passing with a load of turf not far off, if he knew the stone upon which letters were said to be written; he immediately asked, if
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* Doctor Newcome.

it was the written stone that was sought? and shewed it to him without hesitation, adding, however, at the same time, that he did not believe the marks represented letters. On this Dr. Browne took the opinion of his friend in confirmation of his own, and they both agreed, without the smallest doubt, that the characters or lines were artificial, and indented by some sharp instrument. He then with a rule and pair of compasses took a copy of them, with which he does not trouble the Academy, as he has since seen a more accurate one taken by the Rev. Mr. Young. In going round the hill marks were perceived of what appeared the mouth or entrance of a cave, of which they endeavoured to clear the entrance, but found it much beyond their ability; yet they observed enough to impress them with a strong persuasion, that the hillock is excavated, the entrance being very like that at New Grange. Another resemblance is in the surrounding circle of upright stones; which, (together with the want of a ditch or foss,) always distinguishes such tumuli, though they are by Dr. T. Molyneux, called Danish mounts, from the forts and mounts usually called raths*, which word also, as he conceives, means a place of judgment. On their return to the written stone, by taking up the earth, they discovered more indented lines towards the bottom of its interior face, longer than any they had seen; but during their absence, the peasant, had, stolen their ruler, which

* It is remarkable that *Rath*, in the German language, signifies counsel or advice, and *Der Rath*, a judgment seat, or senate or council.

which happened to be of ivory, and prevented further copying of these curious marks. Dr. Browne observes, that he could not satisfactorily trace any transverse horizontal line, crossing the others, such as is usually delineated in the Collectanea and elsewhere; he thought he could in some places observe such a line, but could not venture to be positive.

THERE is, he says, within seven miles of Dublin, a circular range of stones, with a stone elbow-seat in the middle of them, evidently the place of the judge; it crowns the top of a hillock, and nothing can more evidently speak its purpose than its appearance. It is on the descent of the Dalkey hills, yet though so near, little known and seldom visited. The inhabitants of Ireland, he observes, seem in general not sufficiently attentive to the antiquities so thickly diffused through the kingdom.

MR. YOUNG, in his account, dated October 14th 1799, says, The immense heap of stones, called the Vicars Cairn, lies to the south-east, and at the distance of four miles from Armagh, in the parish of Mullabrack, seems to be much diminished from its original size. During the memory of the oldest men in the neighbourhood, it has been used as the public quarry for the repair of roads; yet whatever the object of the first builders was, seems
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now to be entirely unknown, but from its extent it must have been a work of considerable labour, time and expense.—The area is circular, forty-four yards in diameter. In the amassing of this heap, there has not been observed any kind of regularity, except in the stones of the circumference, these (from the present remains) seem to have been placed close to each other, in order to contain the smaller stones of which the Cairn is composed. Those that remain perfect are one yard each above the surface of the ground, and supposed to be as much below it; they must have been all (when first placed there) equal, or as nearly so, as stones in their natural state could be procured.—The most perfect stone A, which is that bearing the Ogham characters, of which a drawing is given, stands declined in an angle of twenty-five degrees from the perpendicular; this declination was intended the better to contain the smaller stones.—After the first external row, all regularity was laid aside, the stones were thrown together promiscuously and of different sizes; they seem to be in general the common stones collected off the fields. Perhaps the delineation of the Ogham characters, with some circumstances, which have lately appeared, relative to the inside of this mass, may assist the antiquary in his research, and enable him to know, at this very remote period, in some degree, what the intention of the original builders had been.

In the year 1785, John M^rCarrol, proprietor of the ground on which the Cairn stands, having penetrated the west-side farther
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than it had been opened before, (in search of large stones in order to build a lime-kiln) came on a door-case; it appeared perfectly sound, but when touched fell into dust; it had been supported there by the stones piled up on either side. The hopes of being rewarded by some hidden treasure (which is the general belief of the country) induced him to remove more stones than he had at first intended; he at length came on a wall situated east and west on either side of the door-case; the stones were placed together without any kind of cement, and seemed to have been regularly prepared for the building.—After labouring for several days, and having traced the wall for ten feet, but without meeting with any thing to reward his trouble, he left off the work.—Since that time the inside of this heap has remained unexplored.—It is held in great veneration by many of those who live near it, who account it impious to carry off any of the stones.—If it ever was frequented by any religious sect, on any particular day, for the purposes of worship, the record of it is totally lost.—The very zealous Roman Catholics never pass or repass without bringing a stone and throwing it on the Cairn to add to the common heap.—They tell many stories of the misfortunes that have happened to those who were daring enough to remove any of the stones of this sacred pile; and what tends to confirm them in these fancies is, that some men living near the place, having ventured to use these stones for the common purpose of building, have since that time been visited by
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different diseases, which they look upon as the just consequence of their impiety.

THE ground on which this Cairn stands is much higher than any other part of the country within many miles of it. From this very elevated situation, on a fine day, the spectator is gratified with a distinct view of seven different counties, viz. Armagh, Monaghan, Tyrone, Antrim, Derry, Down, and Louth, and many lakes of different sizes, adding much to the beauty of the scene.